

REMARKS

Claims 1-32 are pending in this Office Action. Claims 1-32 are rejected.

Claims 1-5, 7-10, 14, 17-24, 26, 27 and 29-32 are rejected under 35 USC 102(e) as being clearly anticipated by U.S. Pat. No. 6,012,982 to Piechowiak et al.

Claims 6, 11-13, 15-16, 25 and 28 are rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Pat. No. 6,012,982 to Piechowiak et al. in view of U.S. Pat. No. 6,135,884 to Hedrick et al.

Claims 1, 4, 14 and 30 are amended. Claim 17 is cancelled.

The Examiner has rejected the claims under §102(e) without identifying which portions of the Piechowiak reference teach or suggest various features of the pending claims. The following is intended to summarize some features cited in the claims but not taught or suggested in the prior art cited by the Examiner:

- Piechowiak does not include a “secondary game” at all but rather includes a “feature” which results in a bonus being automatically paid. [claims 1-21, 23-25, and 30-32]
- The secondary game is not “initiated” from one of the gaming machines which, in the preferred embodiment as set forth in claim 5, is an actuator which the player manually depresses to start the secondary game. [claims 1-21, 23-25, and 30-32]
- The method of deactivating the gaming machine actuator for the primary game in favor of the secondary game, so that the same actuator can be used to initiate only one or the other of the games, is not taught or suggested in Piechowiak. [claim 5]
- Variables of user controlled play (e.g. the rate of play noted in claims 22-25) are not monitored by the Piechowiak device. [claims 22-29]
- No secondary game “queue” is taught or suggested in Piechowiak. [claim 24]

Claims 1-32 are pending in the application and are drawn generally to a gaming system comprising a plurality of individual gaming machines for playing a primary game (slots) that are networked together to play a common secondary game (wheel of fortune/roulette) to all of the gaming machines when a certain triggering event occurs (a certain reel combination on the primary game). Other aspects of the game are that the secondary game can be initiated from the gaming machine achieving the triggering event, that the secondary game is displayed on a plasma display viewable by all gaming machines, and that the system includes a tertiary game (sub-roulette) responsive to a second occurrence of the triggering event.

All claims have been rejected as being taught by or obvious in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,012,982 (Piechowiak et al.) owned by Sigma Game, Inc. The Piechowiak patent teaches a gaming system in which a plurality of gaming machines are linked to a common feature controller. Applicant's own review of the Piechowiak patent leads to the following operational understanding of the devices and methods taught therein:

A plurality of gaming machines are linked over a network to a common feature controller. Each of these games is a slot type game with three reels that present a particular symbol combination with each play. There are two types of combinations: a first type and a second type. The first type pays awards according to the gaming machine paytable. The second type increments a bonus counter that is displayed on a common display or at each individual machine. When the bonus counter exceeds a particular threshold, then a bonus is paid to the machine whose play caused the counter to exceed the threshold. In other embodiments, each combination of a second type will cause a new letter in the word "BONUS" to light up (FIG. 7) until the entire word is lit and the bonus paid out, or each combination of a second type will cause a particular square on a bingo board to light up (FIG. 8) until a row, column or diagonal of squares are lit and the bonus paid out. (see, e.g., col. 6, lines 22-61)

The Examiner states without much discussion within the Office Action that the Piechowiak patent teaches a system where a secondary game is common to all the machines in the network. Although applicant disagrees that the bonus feature taught by Piechowiak can be considered a "secondary game", applicant believes that philosophical difference can be avoided by the limitation existing in the pending claims – namely, that the secondary game is "initiated from one of the gaming machines" [claim 1] or includes "means for initiating the secondary game from the gaming machine" [claim 14] and includes an "outcome" responsive to which a bonus is paid. In contrast, the Piechowiak bonus feature is not initiated at the gaming machine but rather is controlled by the bonus controller 110 which periodically polls the gaming machines for results of the primary game. A player of the Piechowiak system would not then have the ability to initiate the secondary game from start to finish as in the present invention. Instead, the actuators 608, 610 on the Piechowiak gaming machine [FIG. 6] only initiate the primary game – they do not initiate the bonus feature as does the external bonus controller 110. Accordingly, applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of the rejections in view of the remarks and amendments.

The method for using the same actuator on the gaming machine to initiate the secondary game by sending a deactivation signal to prevent the actuator from initiating the

primary game is not taught at all in the prior art cited by the Examiner. Piechowiak does not even suggest such a feature and there is no motivation to include such a feature since the bonus feature is not initiated from the gaming machine. Claim 5 is thus clearly allowable over the prior art.

The method for placing the selected gaming machine in a queue to play the secondary game responsive to the triggering event is not taught or suggested by Piechowiak. Instead, the bonus feature in Piechowiak is immediately awarded to a gaming machine player upon the xth common occurrence of a predetermined combination obtained in the primary slot game. Claim 24 is thus clearly allowable over the prior art of record.

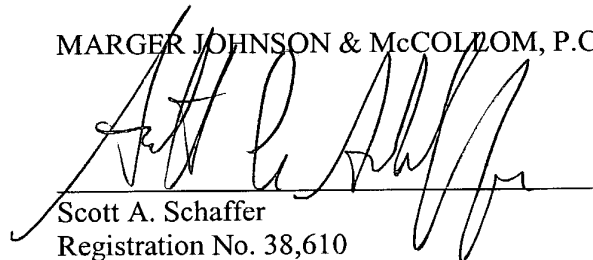
Finally, triggering a bonus responsive to a monitored user-controlled variable such as the number of coins played is not taught in Piechowiak. Piechowiak instead monitors game outcomes using the bonus controller 110, a result that is not user-controlled but is instead a random occurrence. Claims 27-29 are thus clearly allowable over the prior art of record.

Conclusion

In view of this amendment and the accompanying argument, applicant requests reconsideration of the application and allowance of the claims as amended. The Examiner is encouraged to contact the undersigned at (503) 222-3613 if it appears that an interview would be helpful in advancing the case.

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VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

In The Claims

1. (Once Amended) A method for operating a group of gaming machines interconnected by a network comprising the steps of:

allowing play to simultaneously occur on the gaming machines, each of said gaming machines having a primary game associated therewith;

detecting a triggering event; [and]

initiating a single secondary game from one of the gaming machines [upon] after the occurrence of the triggering event, said single secondary game being common to the group of gaming machines and resulting in an outcome; and

paying a first bonus responsive to the outcome of the secondary game.

4. (Once Amended) The method of claim 3 further including paying [a] the first bonus to the selected machine responsive to [an] the outcome of the secondary game.

14. (Once Amended) An apparatus for selectively operating a plurality of machines over a network, said apparatus comprising:

a plurality of gaming machines for playing a primary game thereon;

an actuator coupled to each of the gaming machines for selective activation of the primary game by a player at a respective gaming machine;

a secondary game controller;

a network coupled to the gaming devices and the controller for exchanging data between the secondary game controller and the gaming devices; [and]

a secondary game coupled to the secondary game controller for displaying the secondary game responsive to signals from the secondary game controller;

wherein the secondary game controller monitors the activity of the gaming devices over the network and causes the secondary game to initiate when an operating parameter meets a predetermined criterion; the apparatus further including

means for selecting one of the plurality of game machines when the operating parameter meets the criterion; and *page 18*

means on said selected machine for initiating said secondary game, wherein said secondary game controller applies a first bonus to the selected machine responsive to an outcome of the secondary game.

Cancel claim 17.

30. (Once Amended) The apparatus according to claim 14 further including a video display device coupled to the secondary game controller for displaying the secondary game responsive to signals [form] from the secondary game controller.